SUPERMAN
IN ACTION COMICS
PART FOUR OF FOUR
RETURN TO KRYPTON
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"AS A SCIENTIST, I RAIL AGAINST EVEN THE SLIGHTEST IMPLICATION THAT OUR LIVES ARE PREDESTINED. FREE WILL IS AS PRECIOUS TO LIFE AS OXYGEN, BY MY RECKONING.
"YET, OF LATE, I CANNOT HELP BUT ADMIT TO A CERTAIN... TREND BINDING MY FELLOW KRYPTONIANS -- IF NOT THE PLANET KRYPTON ITSELF...
"... SELF-DESTRUCTION SEEMS TO BE BUILT INTO OUR GENETIC CODE.
"RAOIST ZEALOTS SLAUGHTER INNOCENTS IN THE STREETS. A GOVERNMENT BASED ON THE PURSUIT OF KNOWLEDGE IS REDUCED TO BARBARIC COMBAT IN RETURN. ALL THE WHILE -- UNNOTICED AS BOTH SIDES ATTEMPT TO ARGUE PHILOSOPHY THROUGH FORCE --
"-- THE SUN THREATENS TO DEVOUR US ALL.
"HAVEN'T WE ALREADY KEPT THIS PLANET FROM SPIRALING INTO THE SUN? IT'S AS IF, NO MATTER HOW HARD WE TRY, KRYPTON IS WILLFULLY OUT TO DESTROY ITSELF."
"NO, JOR-EL... NOT ITSELF..."

... THIS KRYPTON WAS MEANT TO DESTROY ME.

"THIS" KRYPTON--?

YOU ELS ARE PRONE TO *DELUSIONS OF GRANDEUR*, AREN'T YOU?

WAR IS MANKIND'S *PREROGATIVE*. IT IS HOW THE *FUTURE* IS FORGED. THIS CONFLICT BETWEEN THE *RAOISTS* AND OURSELVES WILL BE NO DIFFERENT.

FAORA, PLEASE... WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT, KAL? WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY *"THIS KRYPTON"*?

WHAT ARE YOU KEEPING FROM ME, SON?

I CAN'T FULLY EXPLAIN IT *YET*, JOR-EL... BUT EITHER THE *PIECES* ARE FINALLY FALLING INTO PLACE, OR I'VE GONE *COMPLETELY* INSANE.

THERE'S *ONE WAY* TO FIND OUT FOR SURE. GET ME INSIDE *THAT*.

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SUPERMAN in ACTION COMICS! PART FOUR OF 4
RETURN TO KRYPTON II
DREAM'S END
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"HOW DO I EXPLAIN IT TO YOU, JOR-EL?
"HOW DO I EXPLAIN THAT THE "HEART OF KRYPTON," OVER WHICH SO MANY HAVE FOUGHT AND DIED, APPEARS TO BE MADE FROM TWO UNIQUE COMPONENTS...?
"TECHNOLOGY FROM BRAINIAC 13, A TIME-TRAVELING DESPOT, AND KRYPTONIAN MATRIX CHAMBERS FROM THE KRYPTON I THOUGHT WAS MY BIRTHPLACE.
"TECHNOLOGY YOU BUILT BUT CLEARLY DON'T REMEMBER.
"HOW DO I EXPLAIN, WHEN ALL I CAN THINK ABOUT, STARING AT THAT MONSTROSITY... IS THAT I'M NO LONGER SURE YOU EVEN EXIST?
"YOU... KRYPTON...

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"...LARA AND HER CHILD...?"

HOW IS SHE?

STABLE... AS IF IT MATTERS.

I HEARD THE EASTERN TIP OF *VATHLO ISLAND* WILL HIT THE *COMBUSTION POINT* WITHIN *HOURS*. HOW LONG CAN WE POSSIBLY HAVE, EVEN HERE IN THE *SAFEHOUSE*?

IF *JOR-EL* STILL BREATHES, WE HAVE A CHANCE. YOU -- *WE MUST* BELIEVE THAT.

DEE DEE DEE DEE DEE DEE DEE

WHAT'S THAT--? *NO!*

YES, *RAO* HELP HER... YES.

SHE'S GONE INTO *LABOR*. PREPARE FOR AN *EMERGENCY DELIVERY*.

DELIVERY INTO *HELL*.

HURRY, *JOR-EL*... THAT YOUR *CHILD* MAY HAVE A WORLD TO BE BORN *INTO*.

IT IS TIME, ACOLYTE, FOR THE TESTING. DO YOU GIVE YOURSELF FREELY TO RAO, BODY AND SOUL?

FOR THE GLORY OF KRYPTON. FOR THE GLORY OF RAO, I RETURN MY BODY TO THE SUN FROM WHICH ALL THINGS COME.

BLESSED RAO, GUIDE US AND SPARE US YOUR WRATH...

FOR RAO! FOR RAO!

NOW!!

FOR RAAAIGH!

SCHRRIIKTT

WHY, BLESSED ONE? WHY DO YOU TEST OUR FAITH SO?

THE HEART OF KRYPTON IS THE KEY TO YOUR GLORY ON KRYPTON... ARE WE NOT WORTHY? HAVE WE NOT SACRIFICED?

OR IS YOUR DISPLEASURE... PUNISHMENT FOR OUR USE OF THE WRETCHED TECHNOLOGY SPAWNED BY YOUR FALLEN ONES IN THE HOUSE OF EL? HAVE WE FAILED YOU...?

NO! I SAY NO! THIS IS THE DAY RAO RETURNS TO KRYPTON!

WE DID NOT SACRIFICE OUR SOULS CLONING ACOLYTES FROM THE HOUSE OF EL TO *FAIL IN FIRE!* IF IT BE BY MEASURE OF *ONE MAN* BEFORE HIS GLORY *ENGULFS US ALL* — *IT WILL BE TODAY!*

WHO DIES NEXT FOR GLORY? FOR KRYPTON?!

I WILL! FOR RAO!

COME, THEN! MAKE HIS WILL INTO —

"FLESH..."

...

FWOOSH

HERETICS! UNCLEAN!

ARE YOU *ALWAYS* THIS ADEPT AT SUBTERFUGE, KAL-EL?

NO... I *USUALLY* JUST FLY THROUGH THE OPPOSITION AT THE SPEED OF SOUND. THIS IS AN *OFF DAY* FOR ME.

THE DISBELIEVERS! STOP -- MNNGH!

YOU MUST HAVE A DEATH WISH, JOR-EL!

CHOOM

DESECRATING RAO'S MOST SACRED TEMPLE -- DEFILING OUR MOST HALLOWED CEREMONIES--!

YOU SHOULD TALK, XON-UR! EVERY SECOND YOU *WASTE* HERE ON YOUR *"HOLY CRUSADE,"* *KRYPTON* GROWS CLOSER TO *EXTINCTION!*

LET *JOR-EL* HELP YOU--!

HSSSSSSSSST

IF KRYPTON IS TO DIE, IT IS THE *WILL OF RAO!* IT IS *PUNISHMENT* FOR FORGETTING THE OLD WAYS!

MEN LIKE JOR-EL AND HIS *ILK* HAVE *DOOMED US ALL* BY STRAYING FROM THE *PATH!*

MEN *TALK* TOO MUCH--

RADOOOM

-- AND ULTIMATELY SAY SO LITTLE.

TO THE HEART, MEN OF EL! LET THE TIGRESS OF ZOD CLEAR YOUR WAY!

GO, KAL-EL!

BUT YOU--

GO!

IN THE NAME OF KRU-EL, HOUND OF ZOD AND BELOVED HUSBAND, I STRIKE YOU DOWN, XON-UR!

INFIDEL WITCH! YOU WILL BURN!

NOW, KAL-EL! GO! FOR KRYPTON!

FOR THE *TRUTH*, FATHER...

COLD FIRE PULLS ITSELF UP THROUGH ME IN MY BRAIN.
I SEE/FEEL THE HEART OF KRYPTON IN ITS PARTS AND ITS TOTALITY.
I KNOW WHY I'M HERE.
BRAINIAC 13. TIME TRAVELER. DESPOT. HE CAME TO A TIME NOT HIS OWN, FOUGHT, LOST.
LOST AGAINST THE KRYPTONIAN AND HIS TECHNOLOGY.
IN DEFEAT COMES A PLAN... GO TO THE SOURCE --
...AND THE ERADICATOR MATRIX... DESIGNED TO SAVE KRYPTON BY TRANSFORMING A NEARBY HUSK OF A PLANET INTO A HABITABLE PARADISE.
"COULD IT DO MORE?" WONDERED THE DESPOT. HIS STUDY BEGINS...
STUDY THE MATRIX. STUDY THE ENEMY. KNOW HIS WEAKNESS, HIS DESIRE. SUPERMAN HAS A DESIRE...
...CONNECTION. A RETURN TO KRYPTON.

-- KRYPTON. TRUE KRYPTON ACROSS TIME AND SPACE. HOME TO THE ONE MAN HE CANNOT CONTROL. HOME TO ONE TECHNOLOGY HE CANNOT DEFEAT. HERE A SOLUTION WILL BE FOUND.
IN JOR-EL
BRAINIAC TRIES TO KILL HIM. SIMPLE AS THAT. DESTROY SUPERMAN BEFORE HE'S EVEN BORN BY KILLING HIS FATHER.
HE FAILS. YET... DOES NOT. BRAINIAC 13 ESCAPES KRYPTON WITH REWARDS FOR HIS TROUBLE... A COPY OF JOR-EL'S DIARIES...
IN THE PHANTOM ZONE, A PLANETOID OF PEACEFUL CREATURES IS REBORN IN THE FIRES OF THE ERADICATOR MATRIX.
HE/I CAME, TEMPTED BY FATHER'S DREAM. OVERJOYED TO FIND MOTHER AND FATHER STILL LIVE. TRAPPED IN BLISS.
ALL THAT REMAINED WAS FOR THE PROGRAM TO RUN ITS COURSE... "DOOMED KRYPTON" HURTLING INTO THE HUNGRY SUN...
...BUT HE/I INTERRUPTED THE PROGRAM. I/HE SAVED THE WORLD. CRITICAL ERROR.
PROGRAMMED INTO AN ERSATZ KRYPTON BASED ON THE DREAMS OF JOR-EL. PERFECT DOWN TO THE MOLECULE. A BEAUTIFUL DEATHTRAP FOR THE LAST SON OF KRYPTON.
SO THE PROGRAM CONTINUES TO RUN, DECOMPOSING. IT WAS NOT MEANT TO LAST.
MUST IT END. ? CAN'T IT BE... REWRITTEN?

HNNGGAAAH!
OUT!
SCHRRRIPT
KAL!
TRAP — ALL — TRAP TO KILL ME — HE TURNED A PLANET INTO KRYPTON — JUST TO —
— MY FATHER'S MATRIX — KEY TO THE PROGRAM —
— ALL A PROGRAM —
"A PROGRAM"?
THE VOICE OF RAO IS FOR THE FAITHFUL! TELL ME WHAT YOU SAW!
PWHOOM
IT MADE ME WANT TO STAY... SO I WOULD —
DIE?
FAORA, YOU ARE REAL... AREN'T YOU? ALL OF YOU?
NOT MY HOME. . NOT THE TRUE KRYPTON, BUT REAL NONETHELESS—?
RISE AND SPEAK, DISBELIEVER...

TELL ME THE WORD OF RAO!
LOVE KILLS.
SO... YOU DID HEAR HIM. MORE.
GRRROWRR!
HNNG
KRYPTO?!

DIDN'T WE KILL YOU ONCE, MONGREL?

PERHAPS THE FIRES OF RAO WILL FINISH --

CLANK

?

YOU CAN'T BLAST HIM WITH THE FURNACE PINNED SHUT.

STAND DOWN.

BURN THEM, LORD! USE YOUR FLAMES TO --

FWHHOOM

YOUR CHOICE. DUCK, DOG.

NEVER! RAO WILL PROVIDE!

BUT I. BELIEVED.

WHINE

YOU DID GOOD. JUST REST NOW.

XON-UR'S NOT DEAD. I CAN STILL HEAR HIM BREATHING... BARELY.

I HAVE TO GET TO HIM AND --

NO.

HERE COMES ANOTHER CONTRACTION! VITALS FAILING.
GIVE ME SOMETHING TO STABILIZE HER!
WAIT! IT'S A TRAP! THE WHOLE THING! A TRAP MEANT FOR ME!
ONLY I CAN SHUT IT DOWN --
YOU'RE NOT JOR-EL!

HAVE... FAITH, KAL-EL.

YOUR FATHER IS *RESPONSIBLE* FOR THIS BEAST, IN SOME MEASURE...

JOR-EL..

BUT...

YOUR FATHER WILL DEAL WITH IT.

BESIDES, I WAS WILLING TO GIVE MY *SOUL* TO SAVE YOU AND YOUR *MOTHER*...

"THE *LEAST* I CAN DO NOW.. IS FACE THE *TRUTH* ABOUT *ALL CREATION.*"

WE'RE DEAD.
WE CRASHED INTO THE SUN AND WE'RE DEAD...
...AND HEAVEN LOOKS LIKE KRYPTON.

YOU ARE NOT DEAD, KAL-EL...

BUT THIS IS HEAVEN.

I AM ONE WITH THE HEART OF KRYPTON. KAL. THE PROGRAM HAS BEEN REWRITTEN. KRYPTON HAS BEEN REVIVED. THE DREAM CONTINUES.

JOR-EL?

"DREAM" THIS... IS A *DREAM*?

NO... AND YES. FOR ME... A DREAM COME TRUE...

FOR THEM, THE INNOCENTS CAUGHT IN A DESIGN FAR BEYOND THEIR IMAGINING...

...REALITY. TO BE CERTAIN. THE BEST REALITY I CAN GIVE THEM.

THANKS TO YOU.

ME? I... I DIDN'T -- THIS WHOLE NIGHTMARE WAS BECAUSE OF *ME*.

HOW DID I DO ANYTHING?

LOVE SAVES, KAL-EL.

YOU GAVE ME THE STRENGTH TO CUT OUT THE CANCER THAT WAS KILLING KRYPTON.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND.

THE ANSWERS ARE ALL HERE, KAL-EL. ALL OF THEM...

...THOUGH I IMAGINE YOU'VE ALREADY DIVINED THE TRUTH FOR YOURSELF.

...

I DON'T *BELONG* HERE ANYMORE, DO I?

THE DREAM MUST CONTINUE... WITHOUT INTERRUPTIONS FROM THE WORLD OUTSIDE YOU MAY STAY, YOU MAY LEAVE...

BUT EITHER MUST BE PERMANENT. THE CHOICE IS YOURS.

...

I UNDERSTAND.

THANK YOU, FOR ALLOWING ME TO BE YOUR FATHER.

THANK YOU FOR DOING SUCH A DAMN GOOD JOB OF IT.

EARTH. NORTH POLE.
OKAY... HERE GOES EVERYTHING...
THE ERADICATOR WENT INSANE BECAUSE OF THE INCONGRUITIES BETWEEN THE TWO KRYPTONS...
LET'S SEE IF WE MADE THINGS BETTER...
PSSSH
OR WORSE.

N-NEW DATA... ASSIMILATING... PROCESSING... K-KAL-EL...
YES. HOW DO YOU FEEL?
I... FEEL...
HEALED. RECONCILED. FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE YOUR INITIAL JOURNEY "BACK TO KRYPTON" COMPLETE.
GREAT. GLAD TO HEAR IT, REALLY...
NOW, CAN YOU EXPLAIN IT TO ME?

THAT KRYPTON I JUST CAME FROM... WASN'T MY KRYPTON. IT WAS... A TRAP, CORRECT?

AFFIRMATIVE. A TRAP LAID BY BRAINIAC 13 TO LURE YOU INTO THE PHANTOM ZONE, WHERE YOU WOULD BE KILLED OR IMPRISONED INDEFINITELY.

BUT IT BECAME... SOMETHING ELSE.

YES. B13 WAS... TOO THOROUGH. THE "PHANTOM KRYPTON" WAS NO COLD PRISON. IT WAS ALIVE. VIBRANT --

-- THE KRYPTON OF YOUR FATHER'S DREAMS, BASED ON A GOLDEN AGE PREDATING YOUR KRYPTON BY WELL OVER 80,000 YEARS.

YOUR FATHER LOVED THAT HISTORICAL PERIOD, THE PASSION AND WONDER IT HELD.

KNOWING THAT THIS "PHANTOM" IS DERIVATIVE OF THE ONE TRUE KRYPTON RECONCILES MY PROGRAM, THE SCHISM WITHIN ME IS HEALED.

...

WAS HE MY FATHER? WAS LARA MY MOTHER?

DOWN TO THE D.N.A., THEY WERE A PERFECT MATCH. THAT WAS B13'S DOWNFALL...

"PHANTOM" JOR-EL WAS ABLE TO ENTER THE MATRIX FROM OUR WORLD AND REPROGRAM IT TO HIS WILL BECAUSE HE WAS JOR-EL, IN MIND AND BODY.

HAD YOU RETURNED TO THE MATRIX CHAMBER... YOU WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN ABLE TO RESTART THE ERADICATOR PROGRAM.

NO. ONLY MY FATHER COULD PULL OFF SOMETHING LIKE THAT.

YOU STILL SEEM VEXED. SHALL I ELIMINATE THE "PHANTOM SET" OF ICONS FROM THE FORTRESS?

NO, I'M FINE. I KNOW NOW THAT THERE WAS ONLY *ONE* TRUE *KRYPTON*...

BUT IN THE *PHANTOM ZONE*, I LEARNED MORE ABOUT MY *MOTHER* AND *FATHER* THAN I *EVER* DID FROM THE COLD PLACE OF MY BIRTH.

THEIR *PASSION*. HIS *DREAMS*... THE VERY SAME ONES THAT INSPIRED HIM TO SEND ME *TO EARTH*...

THEY *STAY*. THE MAN *AND* HIS *DREAMS*... AND HIS *DOG*. HEH...

WOOF!

YOU'RE *IT*, BOY. HOPE YOU LIKE IT HERE, 'CAUSE YOU'RE *STUCK* WITH ME.

"INDEED, KAL-EL. *ALL PATHWAYS* TO THE *'PHANTOM KRYPTON'* HAVE VANISHED.

"WHEN JOR-EL BECAME ONE WITH THE *MATRIX*, HE SEALED IT OFF, SO THAT NOTHING IN THE PHANTOM ZONE, OR OUTSIDE OF IT, COULD EVER CAUSE HER HARM.

"WHAT HAPPENED NEXT, WE CAN ONLY *GUESS* --"

"NO... I THINK I HAVE A PRETTY GOOD IDEA WHAT HAPPENED NEXT."

"WHAT, KAL-EL?"

THEY LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER...

ALL OF THEM.

END